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ABSTRACT

Two years prior to a 1995 comprehensive evaluation visit by the North Central Association, Iowa's Hawkeye Community College initiated a self-study process and began developing a strategic plan to effect a transition from a technical institution to a comprehensive community college. Staff involvement and open communication were identified as essential elements early in the process and due to the effects of the major institutional change, faculty and staff were very interested in becoming involved. The self-study steering committee and five criterion committees that were developed included broad representation of faculty, students, administrators, and classified staff. In addition, institutional assessment surveys were administered to staff in 1992 and again in 1994 to allow staff input regarding college mission and the transition. To effectively communicate with faculty and staff during the self-study process, the college used formal presentations at college and faculty in-service programs, the publication of committee meetings, formal presentations to the Board of Trustees, discussions at divisional staff meetings, distribution of survey results to faculty and staff, and periodic updates presented in the weekly college newsletter. In January of 1995, multiple copies of the final self-study report were distributed to the college community, and activities changed to focus on the upcoming evaluation visit. (TGI)

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Facilitating Communication in the Self-Study Process

Carol Brobst

The self-study process at Hawkeye Community College was initiated more than two years prior to the comprehensive evaluation visit in March of 1995. In planning the process, two elements were initially identified for the college to be successful in its self-study; specifically, staff involvement and open communication. Reflecting on the success of the self-study and the related evaluation visit at Hawkeye, it is apparent that continuous focus on these two important aspects greatly enhanced the college's achievement in its reaccreditation efforts.

At the same time Hawkeye Community College was involved in the self-study process for the North Central Association evaluation, it was developing and implementing a three-year strategic plan to transition from a technical institution to a comprehensive community college. Because of the impact of this major institutional change, staff were highly interested in identifying potential environmental changes that were needed to effectively implement the revised institutional mission. Therefore, faculty and staff were also eager to become involved in the self-study process. Appointment of the Self-Study Coordinator, the Steering Committee, and five Criterion Committees resulted in broad representation of faculty, students, administrators, and classified staff.

Staff Participation

From the onset, the college President communicated strong commitment and support for the self-study process. Verbally, at a college-wide inservice program as the self-study began, the President and Self-Study Coordinator emphasized the importance of having extensive participation of college staff throughout the process. They also expressed their interest in having the process conducted in an environment of openness. It was stressed that such a process would yield the most meaningful results for institutional growth and improvement as well as present an accurate evaluation of the institution. At the same inservice meeting, the first opportunity for involvement of college staff in the self-study process was given. An Institutional Assessment Survey was administered to staff in the fall of 1992 to evaluate college services and operations in view of the college's new comprehensive community college mission. The survey was administered again in the fall of 1994 for comparative data. Results of the survey were communicated throughout the college and included in the Self-Study Report.

Related to the college's strategic planning, Face Validity Exercises (focus groups) were conducted to identify and prioritize institutional strengths and challenges. These groups were facilitated by the Strategic Planning Committee with participation of 160 staff. Information obtained from the groups was used with the Institutional Assessment Survey in the self-study.

Structured Questions

From the fall of 1992 through the spring of 1995, self-study was a "household word" throughout the college. If faculty and staff were not involved in various self-study committees, they were reading or hearing about activities that were occurring. The Steering Committee developed approximately 200 questions that needed to be answered to provide criterion committees with information about their areas of study. Examples of topics included: faculty governance, evidence of support for the college's mission, division and department goals, evidence of freedom of inquiry by faculty and students, effectiveness of the budgeting process, student clubs and organizations, facility description, and employee demographics. These questions were distributed for response to administrators and departments within the four major divisions of the college. In addition, the President's Cabinet, composed of division vice presidents, addressed and responded to questions as a group. Information obtained through this process was used in development of Criterion Committee reports. Specific data obtained was often shared with all staff through the college's weekly newsletter keeping the self-study process in the forefront.

Throughout the process, frequent meetings (formal and informal) were held between the President and Self-Study Coordinator to discuss self-study issues and to plan opportunities for continued involvement of college staff in the process. Progress in meeting the established timeline for preparation of the Self-Study Report was also reviewed periodically.

The College's Board of Trustees was informed of the plan for conducting the institutional self-study and the timeline for completion of the study. Periodically, Trustees participated in some of the same activities college staff were involved in; i.e. the Institutional Assessment Survey and Face Validity Exercises. At regular intervals, updates on the self-study were presented to the Board of Trustees.

Communication Activities

During the self-study a number of activities were used to communicate with faculty and staff about the self-study process, including:

- Formal presentations at college inservice programs
- Formal presentations at faculty inservice programs
- Publication of Steering Committee and Criterion Committee meetings
- Formal presentations to Board of Trustees
- Discussions at divisional staff meetings

- Distribution of survey analyses to faculty and staff:
  - ⇒ Institutional Assessment Survey
  - ⇒ High School Student Interest Survey
  - ⇒ Entering Student Survey
  - ⇒ Student Opinion Survey
  - ⇒ Withdrawing/Non-returning Student Survey
  - ⇒ Alumni Follow-up
  - ⇒ Community Interest Surveys

- Periodic updates presented in Hawkeye Happenings (weekly college newsletter)

Self-Study Report Review

Preparation of the Self-Study Report was the responsibility of the Self-Study Coordinator assisted by the Steering Committee. The final report included formal reports from the five Criterion Committees. As criterion reports were developed by the respective Committee Co-chairs, each committee member reviewed and endorsed the report. This process validated the individual Criterion Committee reports as they were submitted to the Steering Committee. Each criterion report was presented to and formally accepted by the Steering Committee prior to inclusion in the Self-Study report. As these reports were shared with the Steering Committee, staff were invited to attend the Committee's meetings and hear the findings of the Criterion Committees.

In November of 1994, 100 copies of the Self-Study Report draft were distributed throughout the college. All staff were informed via a college-wide inservice meeting and the Hawkeye Happenings that additional draft copies were available for review. Staff were encouraged to participate in the review process. Two weeks after distribution of the draft, meetings were set up at various times and locations throughout the college for staff to meet with the Steering Committee to discuss the draft report and to bring issues forward from the report. Once again, this action reinforced openness of the process and institutional support of the report prior to final publication.

In January of 1995, multiple copies of the final Self-Study Report were distributed to the college community, and activities changed to focus on the upcoming evaluation visit. A formal meeting was held with all college staff and faculty followed by individual meetings with Student Government, the college's Board of Trustees, the President's Cabinet, and the Administrative Council. At each of these meetings, the Self-Study Coordinator reviewed the proposed schedule for the comprehensive evaluation visit, noted the role various individuals and groups would have with the evaluation team, and emphasized open times during the site visit agenda for staff and students to meet with the visitation team. Staff were also provided with information about the evaluation team members and the institutions from which they came. These meetings reinforced the

readiness of the college for the visit and helped Trustees, faculty, staff, and students understand the importance of participating in the upcoming visit.

Conclusion

Throughout the process, the College President, the Steering Committee, the Self-Study Coordinator, faculty and administrative staff were all involved in keeping the self-study an institutional priority. At the conclusion of the evaluation visit (three hours after the evaluation team had left the campus) a college-wide celebration was held for students and staff to share in culmination of a successful self-study and visit. Once again, the activity emphasized the importance of open communication and extensive staff and student involvement throughout the process. More than 1000 individuals participated in this event acknowledging the college's major accomplishment.